
Orthodox Medicine Humanistic Medicine Holistic Health Care

IN THE DECEMBER 1979 issue the editors began a forum for discussing orthodox medicine, humanistic medicine and holistic health care. The response from readers has been so great that contributions to the forum no longer can be accepted. A future issue of the journal will carry a summary of the dialogue and discussion.

—MSMW

On the Etiology of the Holistic Pseudoschism

BARRY D. ORVELL, MD

I AM DEEPLY MOVED by the courage of the journal in having a forum about alternative health modes. The articles have been varied and impassioned. Your intent to heal the body of medicine has necessarily brought it to surgery instead of autopsy. And the letting of some bloody and inflamed writing is greatly appreciated by those of us in medicine who have been struggling with these important issues in silence. By way of comment, I wish to share my perception of the historical context from which this paper and others like it come.

There is a recent tension in the matrix of medicine which cannot be ignored. With the exponential growth of medical knowledge in the last half century, two things have happened. Doctors are being sued, and an increasing portion of the public is turning to alternative health modalities. What happened?

In earlier days, the physician was revered for his compassion above all else. By the warmth of his presence, he offered comfort and consolation to his patient and to each member of the patient's

household. He shared in the common helplessness of man whose fate was determined by an indifferent universe. His sense of impotence was made all the more poignant by the sense of divine will as offered by the clergy. At the deathbed, both men stood. They struck a sense of balance in the universe and this must have had a profoundly soothing effect on the household. There was a time then to press hands in gratitude for our common humanity before leaving the household.

The advent of modern medical knowledge and technology allowed the man of caring to do more than wring his hands and press other hands. He became a man of doing. This doing increased steadily. He could do more in less time, and thereby help more people to get over their illnesses. He, the physician, became aware now of the shortage of time—time to learn more, time to do more, no time to rest. In other words, he became a very busy person. Thus, the man of compassion became rude at times.

In this frantic flow of events, the accruelement of more knowledge and more power to cure silently rearranged our priorities. This process continues even now, with an accelerated pace, and we need to stop and take a look at where we are. We are more in our heads than in our hearts. It used to be the other way. There should be nothing incompatible between caring and curing. I believe that as physicians, we do care. But because of the imbalance of little time and big power, our caring got partially twisted, and our humanity got pushed aside just enough to be noticed. It is understandable that people became frightened and angered at this man who had no time to explain things to them.

Sometimes I think the public would prefer a return to the 19th century style of medicine. Sometimes I think people prefer love to longevity. Sometimes I think doctors and patients have differing ideas of the role of a doctor.

It is when I consider, side by side, these two simultaneous events—the rise of holistic medicine and the rise of malpractice suits—that I get such thoughts. Perhaps the bridge between mainstream medicine and holistic medicine is time, the time to care.

There is no cause for alarm. The message is not to tear down the Establishment. It is, rather, to join it, and breathe more life into it. We all share a common pulse.

Dr. Orvell is in the private practice of internal medicine and nephrology in Oakland, California.

Refer to: Orvell BD: On the etiology of the holistic pseudoschism, *In* Orthodox medicine, humanist medicine and holistic health care—A forum. *West J Med* 133:78, Jul 1980